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PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ  
RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG

DE RUEHAH #0190 0370715

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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2275

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4802

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2585

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2450

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 3046

RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEHVE/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 3312

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000190

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EEB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EIND](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: DECREPIT ASHGABAT GLASS FACTORY

STUBBORNLY MARCHES ON

¶1. As part of Post's language program, a small group of Embassy Officers on January 30 visited a small glass factory still operating in the heart of Ashgabat. The Saparmurat Niyazov Glass Factory, located just a few miles from the Embassy, has been in operation since 1936. According to its current director, the factory was once one of the most productive in the Soviet Union, producing a variety of glass panes and household glassware that was shipped by train to every Soviet Republic. The factory had employed 1,700 people and operated on a 24-hour basis with nine gas-powered furnaces and production lines. A sister factory also operated in Bryansk, Russia.

¶2. All the raw material to produce high quality glass was native to Turkmenistan, except for sodium carbonate. Sodium carbonate lowers the melting point temperature needed to make glass, both simplifying the process and reducing the energy costs of production. The factory had a reliable free supply of sodium carbonate from Ukraine before 1990, but the director said that after independence, the factory had to begin purchasing the material on the open market.

¶3. Today only one gas furnace is functional, and the factory now produces modest quantities of pane glass and glass blocks for domestic use, probably in the provinces where esthetics are less important. The glass is made from local recycled glass waste, and is of poor quality. The director claimed that 108 people are still employed at the factory, but during the visit it appeared that there were more people working on the surrounding landscape than were observed within the factory. Surprisingly, the factory still operates on a 24-hour basis, as though no one ever dared consider whether to change the modus operandi. Army conscripts are tasked with security of the dilapidated factory.

¶4. The factory's equipment appeared to date back to the 1930s. The furnaces were constructed of thick bricks, and their interiors looked as if coated in melted caramel. Ancient water pipes dribbled streams of water on the floor, and electrical wiring hung loose, no longer connected to some key piece of equipment. The final stop of the tour was in a 1960s-era control room, where decades earlier dials and gauges provided regular temperature, pressure and other

readings for the various stages of the process. Now, the controls and gauges were dark and dusty. The director, with a touch of humor, showed the visitors a large reporting log with a recycled cardboard cover. He also had a subordinate show the group the factory's pride and joy -- a 1970s-era hand-held pyrometer that, in the absence of other functioning controls, allowed technicians to monitor the temperature of the glass at various points of the production process. The temperatures were regularly entered in the log book, the director said, so that if substandard quality glass occurred, "we know who to blame."

15. In 2006, in coordination with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Turkmen officials signed a contract with a Chinese company to construct a new, modern glass factory a short distance from this one, he said. When asked when the new factory was scheduled to open, the director smiled and said "December 2008." He went on to say that a new deadline had been set for April 2009, but he was skeptical that it would open on time.

16. COMMENT: The factory appears to have been largely ignored since the transition from Soviet central government control to that of the Turkmen government, which is unfortunate considering the local availability of most raw materials needed for glass manufacturing. Still, its managers are making the best of what they have, and the factory does perform a useful service in recycling local glass into a usable product. END COMMENT.  
MILES